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FSSAI to check quality of spices sold in India

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has started taking samples of spice-mix products from across the country after Hong Kong and Singapore flagged high ethylene oxide levels. The food safety regulator said it is taking samples of spices in powder form of all brands, including MDH and Everest—the two companies whose products are under scrutiny in Singapore and Hong Kong | **P15**



Phir Ek Baar
Modi Sarkar

In the next 5 years
will make 3 Crore Women
Lakshpati Didis

Press the lotus button  Make BJP win

THIS IS
MODI'S
GUARANTEE



Surat of things to come as BJP gets 1st LS seat

Party's candidate Dalal elected unopposed

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA
@ Ahmedabad

THE BJP on Monday opened its 2024 Lok Sabha account from Surat by winning the constituency without any contest.

In the process, Mukeshbhai Dalal became the first candidate of any party since 12 years in a general election to be elected unopposed. The last such instance was of Samajwadi Party's Dimple Yadav winning the Kannauj Lok Sabha bypoll in 2012 unopposed.

Eight other candidates left in the Surat fray withdrew after Congress nominee Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination form was rejected by returning officer Sourabh Parthi on Sunday.

Kumbhani's papers had purported inconsistencies in the signatures of his proposers. The papers of the Congress dummy candidate Suresh Padsala, too, were rejected on similar grounds. "As all eight candidates who had successfully filed their papers for the Surat Lok Sabha seat withdrew on Monday, Dalal has been elected unopposed," said Parthi.

The Surat Congress, however, claimed that the entire exercise was premeditated. Surat Congress leader Pappan Togadia told this newspaper, "I alerted party leaders and the South Gujarat Congress in-charge, Usha Naidu, about plot to reject Kumbhani's papers. But my warnings went unheeded. I believe Kumbhani will



BJP Surat candidate Mukeshbhai Dalal after he was elected unopposed

soon join the BJP"

While the last day for filing nomination papers was Friday, their scrutiny happened the following day. The withdrawal window for candidates closed at 3 pm on Monday.

The drama began on Saturday with the BJP questioning the legitimacy of signatures on Kumbhani's papers. Subsequent scrutiny revealed that three persons who proposed Kumbhani's candidature claimed their signatures were forged. For his part, Kumbhani alleged that his supporters had been abducted.

Curiously, Kumbhani's proposers are close relatives. All three vanished after the controversy broke. Amid a Congress scramble to legally challenge the rejection of his papers, Kumbhani left for Goa purportedly to avoid signing the papers. There is also speculation about his links with Patidar leaders Alpesh Kathiriyani and Dharmik Malaviya, who quit the AAP last week and are said to be bound for the BJP.

K'taka to get central drought aid by Monday

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@ New Delhi

THE Union government on Monday assured the Supreme Court that the funds needed by the Karnataka government to tackle drought will be released "expeditiously".

This assurance was given by the Attorney General R Venkatesh to the apex court bench led by Justice BR Gavand comprising Justice Sandeep Mehta.

The AG said, "It will be done expeditiously," during the course of the hearing.

When senior lawyer Kapil Sibal, representing the Karnataka government, stressed the need for immediate release of central funds to Karnataka to tackle drought, the AG said the Election Commission of India has allowed the Union government to deal with the issue. Something will happen before next Monday.

Sibal said it is fine if it happens before next Monday. The court observed that it has to happen amicably given this is a federal structure.

The apex court said that the Centre and states should not



fight over release of funds to tackle natural calamities.

The Karnataka government had moved the apex court seek-

ing its direction to the Centre to release Rs 35,162 crore to tackle drought in the state.

The Supreme Court was hearing the Karnataka government's petition against the Centre seeking release of assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

In its petition, the Karnataka government accused the Centre of not providing financial assistance for drought management although it had submitted several memorandums to it.

CM SAYS JUSTICE FOR STATE: P6

HC nixes 24,600 school teacher jobs in Bengal

SULAGNA SENGUPTA @ Kolkata

THE Calcutta High Court on Monday cancelled all appointments of teachers and non-teaching staff recruited through the West Bengal School Service Commission's (WBSSC) State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST-2016) after it found that bribes were paid to secure recruitments.

The order will cancel more than 24,000 appointments. About 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the SLST-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts. A division bench of the court comprising Justices Debansu Basak and Shabbir Rashid directed the CBI to investigate and submit a report.

The court had ordered a re-evaluation of the Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheets of candidates from the 2016 recruitment exam after it received petitions alleging irregularity. The re-evaluation brought to light that many of those selected were recruited against blank OMR sheets. Those recruited in such a way must immediately surrender the salaries they have drawn to the jurisdictional magistrate, the court said in its order.

The bench directed the WBSSC to initiate a fresh recruitment process.

Reacting to the court order, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said her government will challenge the 'illegal' verdict. "The court verdict cancelling all recruitments is illegal. We stand by those who lost their jobs. We will ensure you get justice, and challenge the order in a higher court," she said. Training her guns on the BJP, Mamata said: "It has turned the courts into their extended party offices. If the BJP files a PIL, prompt action is taken and people are sent to jail. No action is initiated when others file." She went on to allege that people aligned with the BJP are given important positions.

Former judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay who joined the BJP recently said: "I have said in my verdict earlier that the Mamata government is corrupt. I thank the Calcutta High Court bench for giving such an order. Now a can of worms will be opened."

CID to probe Neha murder, spl court to speed up trial

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Shivamogga

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday announced that the Neha Hiremath murder case will be transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and a special court will be established for its speedy trial. He told reporters here that the CID will be instructed to file the chargesheet within a stipulated time.

On why he hasn't visited Neha's parents yet, the CM said the Hubballi-Dharwad district in-charge minister has already met them. "Our party workers have also visited them. Minister HK Patil will also visit them. I will meet Neha's family members during my next visit to Hubballi," the CM said.

On BJP's allegation that the law and order situation in the state has deteriorated, Siddaramaiah said, "The crime rate has come down after the Congress came to power in the state." The CM said Neha's father has mentioned about the involvement of four more suspects in the case. "I have asked the officers to investigate the case from that angle too," he added.

Neha, 24, a student of BVB College in Hubballi, was stabbed to death on the campus on Thursday **MORE: P4**



D Gukesh shows his Candidates trophy after emerging victorious at the event in Toronto on Sunday | STEV DONAHUE/FIDE X

Gukesh youngest candidate to vie for the World crown

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @ Chennai

SOME of chess' greatest names have called the coming age 'the era of Indian chess'. The Polgars, Judit and Susan. Former world champions, Viswanathan Anand and Magnus Carlsen. Former Candidate winner, Boris Gelfand, and the only two-time winner of the World Cup, Levon Aronian... they have all heaped praise on the next generation of Indian kids.

They were all proved right in the early hours of Monday as D Gukesh, all of 17, completed a logic-defying, history-being-rewritten three weeks in Toronto as he became the youngest ever winner of the Candidates tournament, an elite eight-player field that identifies the next challenger of the World Championships

(Gukesh will face Ding Liren later in the year for a shot at immortality). The Chennai boy became only the second Indian after Anand to win the event.

In the 14th and final round inside the city's Great Hall, Gukesh, sole leader by 0.5 points, drew against Hikaru Nakamura after 71 moves. Nakamura, one of the pre-Candidates favourites, needed a win to stay in contention. With white, he gave it his all but never got change on a day when Gukesh stayed rock solid till the very end.

While that draw put Gukesh on the brink of victory, there was another match going on on the table next to theirs. It featured Fabiano Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtch, two players who had been joint second coming into the final round. Both

players needed a win while hoping the Indian didn't win. They got the first wish but the win just wouldn't come for either of them. Both of them kept at it gamely and agreed to draw after a marathon 109 moves and six hours of match play.

It feels remarkable that if it wasn't for an elite-level tournament arranged in short notice, Gukesh wouldn't have qualified. The Tamil Nadu government played a helping hand in bringing the event to Chennai.

This Candidates title completes a remarkable turnaround for the GM D Gukesh. From August, he had been on a downward spiral. Post a loss to Carlsen at the World Cup, he had felt out of it. "I wasn't in a good mental space," he had said. Now, he must be in the good mental space. **MORE: P17**

Gadag murders: BJP neta's son among 8 held

RAGHOTTAM KOPPAR @ Gadag

POLICE arrested eight people, including local BJP leader Prakash Bakale's elder son Vinayak Bakale, on Monday in connection with the murder of four members of the Bakale family in Gadag on Friday night.

According to police sources, Vinayak gave Rs 65-lakh "supari" to seven people to kill his father and other members of the family. The "supari" killers have been identified as Feroz Qazi, 29, Zeeshan Qazi, 24, Sahil Qazi, 19, Sohail Qazi, 19, Sultan Sheikh, 23, Mahesh Solanke, 21, and Wahid Bepari, 21, from Miraj in Maharashtra. **P5**

Kharge prestige at stake in son-in-law's fight

RAMAKRISHNA BADSESHI
@ Kalaburagi

CONGRESS chief Mallikarjun Kharge is not contesting from the Gulbarga Lok Sabha constituency but he is putting all his might to win this SC-reserved seat, which he lost in the 2019 general elections. That shocking defeat dented his image as *Solitada Saradara* (one who has not tasted defeat). And to reclaim his reputation, Kharge has fielded his son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani in Gulbarga. For the octogenarian, Kalaburagi (formerly Gulbarga) is his *karma bhumi*, which elected him 10 times to the Assembly and twice to the Lok Sabha.

Doddamani is also Kharge's brother-in-law as he is the

younger brother of Radhabai Kharge. In line with the popular saying in Hindi *Sari duniya ek taraf, joru ka bhai ek taraf* (The whole world is on one side, wife's brother on the other side), Kharge has already addressed public gatherings twice in Kalaburagi in the past month, and is visiting again on April 24. The veteran leader gets daily updates from Doddamani, while his son Priyank Kharge and strong follower Dr Sharanaprakash Patil are sweating it out in the scorching summer heat to ensure victory.

The Congress has systematically planned Doddamani's election campaign. While the party has claimed credit for implementing the five guarantees and amending Article 371-J for Kalyana Karnataka Region, Priyank and Sharanaprakash have been meeting caste groups and working classes separately.

Also, people are sympathetic towards Doddamani because of his soft manners and he is using the strategies that Kharge used to win Assembly and Parliamentary elections. But the BJP is equally determined to retain the Gulbarga seat and has fielded the sitting MP Umesh Jadhav, who defeated Kharge in 2019. It was

from Kalaburagi that Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the saffron party's election campaign in Karnataka on March 16, the day the Election Commission of India announced the Lok Sabha poll schedule for the country.

However, Jadhav has to square off anti-incumbency. Sensing the mood against him for not being able to bring projects to Kalaburagi, PM Modi launched a mega textile park in the district last year and two direct trains between Bengaluru and Kalaburagi recently. During his tour of villages, Jadhav is seeking votes for his work as well as for Modi's achievements.

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To up voter turnout, tourist spots in Mysuru to be shut

KARTHIK KK @ Mysuru

WITH campaigning gaining momentum in Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha constituency, the election authorities are leaving no stone unturned to ensure a robust voter turnout on April 26.

In a proactive move, the authorities have decided to shut tourist spots, including the renowned Mysuru zoo and Karanji Lake, in the constituency on polling day to encourage people to take part in the festival of democracy without fail.

Accordingly, Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, popularly known as Mysuru zoo, has announced that the zoo and Karanji

Lake will remain closed for the public on April 26.

This decision, though aimed at preventing a dip in voter turnout due to holiday distractions, also underscores the significance of every vote in shaping the region's future.

The city's hospitality sector has also taken measures to incentivise voting. Hotels and restaurants in Mysuru have come together to offer discounts and special packages for voters who visit them after exercising their franchise. This initiative not only adds a festive touch to the civic duty of voting, but also encourages people to engage in the election process actively. **P8**